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ABSTRACT

A study involving 215 college students was undertaken to determine the relationship between assertiveness and communication apprehension by factor analyzing the items on the Bathus Assertiveness Schedule (BAS) and on the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). Six factors emerged from the analysis: apprehensive about speaking, apprehensive about interpersonal communication, preventing others from taking advantage, being candid, being contentious, and making complaints in restaurants. Of the six factors, the first came exclusively from the PRCA, the second from both instruments, and the remaining four exclusively from the BAS. The linkage between assertiveness and apprehension about communication, as measured by these two instruments, appears to be apprehension about interpersonal communication. The findings gererally confirm the previously established factor structure of the BAS; however, they challenge the unidimensionality of the PRCA. (FI)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND ASSERTIVENESS

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Abstract

Communication apprehension has been of concern to communication researchers for over four decades. Indeed, fifteen to twenty per cent of those students enrolling in basic communication courses suffer from high communication apprehension. Assertiveness has moved from the clinical setting to classroom application more recently. Units on assertion are included in the fundamentals courses at some universities; chapters on assertiveness are offered in textbooks on the basic course level; and entire courses on the concept are being introduced in speech communication departments. The relationship between the two phenomena are of interest to speech communication instructors.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between assertiveness and communication apprehension. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension were administered to students (n = 215) at a large midwestern university. The research question posed in this study follows: Do any common factors exist between the items on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension?

Responses to the two instruments were submitted to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. Five through eight factors were rotated on the basis of the scree test, and each solution was inspected. Since the seven and eight factor solutions were not interpretable, the six factor solution was adopted. The six factors which emerged are: apprehensive about public speaking, apprehensive about interpersonal communication, preventing others from taking advantage, candid, contentious, and making complaints in restaurants. The first factor came exclusively from the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, the second factor came from both instruments and the third through the sixth factors came exclusively from the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule. The common factor in the two measures holds implications for researchers and teachers. The two factor extraction from the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension calls into question earlier reports of unidimensionality.

Assertiveness is defined in terms of communication and the measurement of assertiveness relies on communication behaviors. The initial definition by Wolpe and Lazarus alludes to communication: "Although the most common class of assertive behaviors involved in therapeutic action is the expression of anger and resentment, the term 'assertive' is used to cover all socially acceptable expressions of personal rights and feelings" (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966, p. 39). Norton and Warnick (1976) found that the subconstructs of assertiveness that emerged from two assertiveness measures were low anxiety, dominance, contentiousness and a refusal to be intimidated by others. Assertiveness correlated highly with verbal intensity, talkativeness, and good style of communication. Eisler, Miller and Hersen (1973) identified five behaviorally defined components of assertiveness: (1) shorter response latencies, (2) louder speech, (3) greater affect, (4) less compliance, and (5) more requests for changes in the behavior of the interpersonal partner. These components represent specific communication behaviors used by researchers to identify assertive behavior.

Researchers posit a relationship between assertiveness and anxiety. Wolpe (1958, 1973) maintains that assertive responses are incompatible with anxiety. Wolpe and Lazarus (1966) argue that anxiety is partly overcome

by self-assertiveness. Morgan (1965) demonstrated an inverse relationship between the Rathus Assertiveness Scale and an index of social fears. Percell (1974) found for women an inverse relationship between assertiveness and anxiety. Gay, Hollandsworth, and Galassi (1975) showed that college students who scored low in assertiveness scored significantly higher on the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale. Finally, Orenstein, Orenstein, and Carr (1975) demonstrated that assertiveness relates inversely with neuroticism, trait anxiety, and interpersonal anxiety.

Assertive training is frequently recommended as a method of reducing anxiety in interpersonal situations (Lazarus, 1966; Wolpe, 1973; Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966). Many alternatives have been suggested for increasing assertiveness, but little attention has been directed toward specifying the relationship between anxiety about communication and assertiveness.

Communication apprehension, the fear or anxiety that an individual associates with real or anticipated oral communication with another person or persons, has been of concern to communication scholars for over four decades. Communication apprehension has been shown to have a negative impact on individual's communication behavior as well as on other essential aspects of their lives (cf. Bashore,

1971; Daly & McCroskey, 1975; Daly & Leth, 1976; Davis, 1977; McCroskey & Anderson, 1976; McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, & Falcione, 1977). Communication apprehension has been shown to be related to anxiety (McCroskey, Daly, & Sorenson, 1976). Furthermore, people who are high communication apprehensives have been shown to be perceived by others to be low in assertiveness and responsiveness (Knutson & Lashbrook, 1976).

The relationship between assertiveness and apprehension about communication has not been systematically examined. Previous research suggests that such a relationship might be posited. This study was undertaken to determine the relationship between assertiveness and apprehension about communication by factor analyzing the items on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 215 undergraduates enrolled in speech communication courses at a large midwestern university.

Procedure

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (Rathus, 1973) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970) were administered at the beginning of an academic term.

Measures

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule measures assertive behaviors or frankness in a variety of business and social settings. It includes 30 items and originally used a six-point Likert scale with 16 reversed items. In this study, the six-point scale was replaced with a five-point scale so items from both instruments could be administered in a single test packet. The author recognized the methodological danger involved in this practice and cautions readers to take this alteration into account when generalizing from the results of this study. The Rathus scale has a reported test-retest reliability of .78 and a split half reliability of .77 for samples of 68 and 67, respectively. Rathus obtained a validity coefficient of .70 between RAS scores and impartial raters' impressions (Rathus, 1973). Significant differences have been demonstrated before and after assertiveness training.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension measures an individual's apprehension about oral communication. The PRCA-College includes 20 items and a five-point Likert scale. Reports of internal reliability have all exceeded .90 (cf., McCroskey, 1978). This measure was selected because of its well established predictive validity as well as its high reliability. The validity of the instrument is examined in a recent research report (McCroskey, 1978).

Statistical Analysis

The statistical method used to determine the factor structure of these two scales was a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation (Harman, 1967). The highest correlation in each row was placed in the diagonal. The eigenvalues for the first ten factors before rotation are reported in Table 1. Five through eight factors were

(INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.)

rotated on the basis of the scree test (Cattell, 1966), and each solution was inspected. Since the seven and eight factor solutions were not interpretable, the six factor solution was adopted. These six factors accounted for 41.7% of the total variance. The criterion used for selecting items to be included in each factor was that the difference in the squares between the primary and secondary loading was .20 or greater.

(INSERT TABLE 2 HERE.)

RESULTS

The six factors which emerged from the two instruments are given in Table 2. These factors were labeled and reported below with their salient items:

Factor 1 (F1) Public Speaking, Apprehensive--does not look forward to opportunities to present public speeches and experiences fear when considering such possibilities. Factor I is characterized by the items "look forward to

public speaking" (-.72), "face speechmaking with confidence" (-.71), "enjoy presenting t. v. show" (-.71), "enjoy experience of speaking" (-.66), "loss for words on platform" (.65) "avoid public speaking" (.64), "confused thoughts in speaking" (.60), "no fear of audience" (.57), "hands tremble on platform" (.56), and "feel more fluent than others" (-.53).

Factor 2 (F2) Interpersonal Communication, Apprehensive does not look forward to opportunities to communicate with the same sex or opposite sex people in dyads or in small groups and experiences fear when considering such situations. This factor is characterized by the items "tense in group discussions (.66), "nervous in a conversation" (.62), "self-conscious in class" (.62), "hesitated to date because of shyness" (.61), "posture feels strained when communicating" (.53), and "enjoy starting conversations" (-.47).

Factor 3 (F3) Preventing Others from Taking Advantage--asserting one's rights, even in unpleasant situations. Factor 3 is identified by the items "people take advantage of me" (-.64), "when injured, do not hurt other's feelings" (-.50), "during an argument, afraid that I will shake" (-.45), and "difficulty in saying 'no' to salespeople" (-.42).

Factor 4 (F4) Candid--willing to be open and frank about feelings and perceptions. This factor is characterized by two items: "open and frank about feelings" (-.70) and "talk to someone who has been spreading stories about me" (-.54).

Factor 5 (F5) Contentious--willing to start arguments, volunteer opinions, or to question others.

Factor 5 is characterized by the items "I sometimes look for an argument" (-.63), "I state my opinion if I disagree with a lecturer" (-.60), and "I insist upon knowing why I must do something" (-.46).

Factor 6 (F6) Making Complaints in Restaurants--Responding definitively in restaurants. Factor 6 is characterized by the items "I complain about food in a restaurant" (-.63) and "I complain about service in a restaurant" (-.58).

DISCUSSION

The current study extracted a total of six factors from the two scales: one factor came exclusively from the personal report scale, four factors came exclusively from the Rathus scale and one factor overlapped the two scales. Readers are cautioned that the findings of this study must be qualified by the replacement of the six-point scale on the Rathus instrument with a five-point scale. The linkage between assertiveness and apprehension about communication, as measured by these instruments, appears to be the common factor of apprehension about interpersonal communication. The recommendation of assertive training for persons suffering from anxiety in interpersonal situations appears valid.

This study generally confirms the previously established factor structure of the RAS; however, the unidimensionality of the PRCA-College has been challenged. It is not possible to compare the factor analytic methods of the current study with the original factor analysis of the instrument since the original statistical analysis is only alluded to in a recent research report (McCroskey, 1978), and the factor analysis has apparently not been reported.

The peripheral finding of two factors rather than one emerging from the PRCA does have implications which require a reexamination of two issues relevant to the PRCA. First, the question of stability of the PRCA factor structure must be raised. The population of this study is probably similar to the earlier population: male and female undergraduate students at large state universities who were enrolled in beginning communication courses were used in both cases. One relevant difference may be the time of the two studies: McCroskey (1978) performed his factor analysis in 1972 before interpersonal communication courses had gained widespread acceptance in college curricula and before the differences between the two communication situations, or courses, had gained salience with undergraduate students. In 1979, curricula are replete with interpersonal communication courses and programs, and undergraduates are keenly aware of the

differences between courses in public speaking and interpersonal communication. Their increased awareness might have allowed them to distinguish between the two types of apprehension represented in the PRCA.

Second, the utility of administering the PRCA when seeking an exclusive measure of public speaking apprehension or of interpersonal communication apprehension is questioned. The bidimensional nature of the scale clouds its usefulness. A more accurate measure for public speaking apprehension would include only those eleven items which loaded on Factor 1 and a more appropriate instrument to measure interpersonal communication apprehension would consist exclusively of the six items which loaded on Factor 2.

At the present time, a high score on the PRCA probably indicates apprehension about public speaking and interpersonal communication while a low score most likely indicates little apprehension about these two communication situations. But what does a score between these two extremes indicate? The person may suffer from interpersonal communication apprehension, but not public speaking apprehension; public speaking apprehension, but not interpersonal communication apprehension; or moderate amounts of apprehension toward both situations. The ambiguity indicated by this two factor solution to the PRCA precludes optimum interpretation of the instrument.

The factor structure of the RAS and PRCA was investigated in this study. The results indicated that both instruments are multifactored and that the two instruments share the common factor of interpersonal communication apprehension. Of perhaps greater importance, this study extracted a two factor solution from the PRCA. This peripheral finding should add clarity and precision to this instrument which is regularly used by researchers and teachers.

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TABLE 1

EIGENVALUES FOR FIRST TEN FACTORS

Factor	Eigenvalue
Factor I	9.40
Factor II	3.42
Factor III	2.51
Factor IV	2.04
Factor V	1.88
Factor VI	1.59
Factor VII	1.51
Factor VIII	1.37
Factor IX	1.28
Factor X	1.24

TABLE 2

PRCA AND RAS FACTOR LOADINGS

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
PRCA Items:						
1. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance I feel very nervous	.23	.62	-.15	.11	.09	.17
2. I have no fear of facing an audience.	-.57	-.08	-.00	.10	-.08	-.18
3. I look forward to expressing my opinion at meetings.	-.39	-.24	.10	-.23	-.37	-.05
4. I look forward to an opportunity to speak in public.	-.72	-.11	.03	-.13	-.18	-.08
5. I find the prospect of speaking mildly pleasant.	-.64	-.10	.05	-.27	.05	.00
6. When communicating, my posture feels strained and unnatural.	.19	.53	-.07	.06	-.13	.06
7. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.	.26	.66	-.00	.06	.10	-.01
8. Although I talk fluently with friends I am at a loss for words on the platform.	.65	.19	-.02	-.16	.00	.03
9. My hands tremble when I try to handle objects on the platform.	.56	.12	-.11	-.24	-.01	.06
10. I always avoid speaking in public if possible.	.64	.33	.01	.14	.08	.04
11. I feel that I am more fluent when talking to people than most other people are.	-.53	-.26	-.05	-.27	-.12	-.19
12. I am fearful and tense all the while I am speaking before a group of people.	.56	.40	-.01	-.27	.08	-.09

TABLE 2

PRCA AND RAS FACTOR LOADINGS (CONTINUED)

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
13. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I speak before an audience.	.60	.27	-.10	-.06	-.01	-.10
14. Although I am nervous just before getting up, I soon forget my fears and enjoy the experience.	-.66	-.06	-.02	-.01	..02	.15
15. Conversing with people who hold positions of authority causes me to be fearful and tense.	.13	.49	-.34	-.17	.12	.13
16. I dislike to use my body and voice expressively.	.37	.19	-.15	.43	-.05	.11
17. I feel relaxed and comfortable while speaking.	-.59	-.40	.03	-.21	.09	-.14
18. I feel self-conscious when I am called upon to answer a question or give an opinion in class.	.21	.62	-.17	-.05	.10	.03
19. I face the prospect of making a speech with complete confidence.	-.71	.11	.01	-.13	-.09	-.20
20. I would enjoy presenting a speech on a local television show.	-.71	.05	.07	-.17	-.10	-.03
RAS Items:						
21. Most people seem to be more aggressive and assertive than I am.	.22	.38	-.18	.16	.40	.13
22. I have hesitated to make or accept dates because of "shyness."	-.04	.61	.16	.33	-.12	.16

TABLE 2

PRCA AND RAS FACTOR LOADINGS (CONTINUED)

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
23. When the food served at a restaurant is not done to my satisfaction, I complain about it to the waiter or waitress.	.02	-.10	-.04	-.15	-.16	-.63
24. I am careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings, even when I feel that I have been injured.	.04	-.05	-.50	.18	.14	-.11
25. If a salesperson has gone to considerable trouble to show me merchandise which is not quite suitable, I have a difficult time in saying "No."	.18	.19	-.42	.02	-.04	.17
26. When I am asked to do something, I insist upon knowing why.	.01	.02	-.00	-.06	-.46	-.08
27. There are times when I look for a good, vigorous argument.	-.04	-.03	.00	.06	-.63	.05
28. I strive to get ahead as well as most people in my position.	-.08	-.17	-.07	.08	-.01	-.33
29. To be honest, people often take advantage of me.	.07	-.03	-.64	.03	-.05	.08
30. I enjoy starting conversations with new acquaintances and strangers.	-.20	-.47	-.10	-.31	-.20	-.02
31. I often don't know what to say to attractive persons of the opposite sex.	.10	.48	-.18	.08	-.07	.17
32. I will hesitate to make phone calls to business establishments and institutions.	.13	.34	-.20	-.07	-.01	.41

TABLE 2

PRCA AND RAS FACTOR LOADINGS (CONTINUED)

Item		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
33.	I would rather apply for a job or for admission to a college by writing letters than by going through with personal interviews.	.34	.19	-.19	-.01	.11	.33
34.	I find it embarrassing to return merchandise.	-.10	.33	-.18	.14	-.17	.40
35.	If a close and respected relative were annoying me, I would smother my feelings rather than express my annoyance.	-.23	.07	-.41	.20	.15	-.03
36.	I have avoided asking questions for fear of sounding stupid.	.06	.37	-.45	.10	.16	.08
37.	During an argument I am sometimes afraid that I will get so upset that I will shake all over.	.17	.18	-.45	-.20	.09	-.09
38.	If a famed and respected lecturer makes a statement which I think is incorrect, I will have the audience hear my point of view as well.	-.13	-.03	.05	-.12	-.60	-.08
39.	I avoid arguing over prices with clerks and salespeople.	-.04	-.13	-.29	.14	-.08	.34
40.	When I have done something important or worthwhile, I manage to let others know about it.	-.05	.05	-.35	-.31	-.21	-.11
41.	I am open and frank about my feelings.	.09	-.26	.16	-.70	-.10	.01

TABLE 2

PRCA AND RAS FACTOR LOADINGS (CONTINUED)

Item		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
42.	If someone has been spreading false and bad stories about me, I see him or her as soon as possible to "have a talk" about it.	-.03	-.06	.06	-.54	-.08	-.19
43.	I often have a hard time saying "No."	.08	.11	-.34	-.16	-.08	.41
44.	I tend to bottle up my emotions rather than make a scene.	.02	.17	-.45	.47	.24	-.05
45.	I complain about poor service in a restaurant and elsewhere.	-.03	.01	-.07	-.25	-.17	-.58
46.	When I am given a compliment, I sometimes just don't know what to say.	.20	.08	-.44	.08	-.23	.20
47.	If a couple near me in a theatre or at a lecture were conversing rather loudly, I would ask them to be quiet or to take their conversation elsewhere.	-.12	-.07	-.08	-.12	-.30	-.44
48.	Anyone attempting to push ahead of me in a line is in for a good battle.	.02	.11	.23	.04	-.48	-.35
49.	I am quick to express an opinion.	-.20	-.35	.17	-.41	-.48	.12
50.	There are times when I just can't say anything.	.04	.33	-.42	.08	.15	-.02
	Total % of variance	12.35	8.75	5.80	5.15	4.84	4.78